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ABSTRACT

Selected findings are presented from a survey designed to measure the needs, plans, and perceptions of teachers (N=1,000) in U.S. public schools. Faced with the responsibility for managing their school's budget with limited resources, most teachers would take several other actions before increasing class size or reducing their future salary increases. Mentor teachers and class size were seen as key factors in effective teaching. For teachers who may leave the profession, students' social problems and salary are major factors in their decision. (IAH)

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Coming to Terms

Teachers' Views on Current Issues in Education

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The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1991

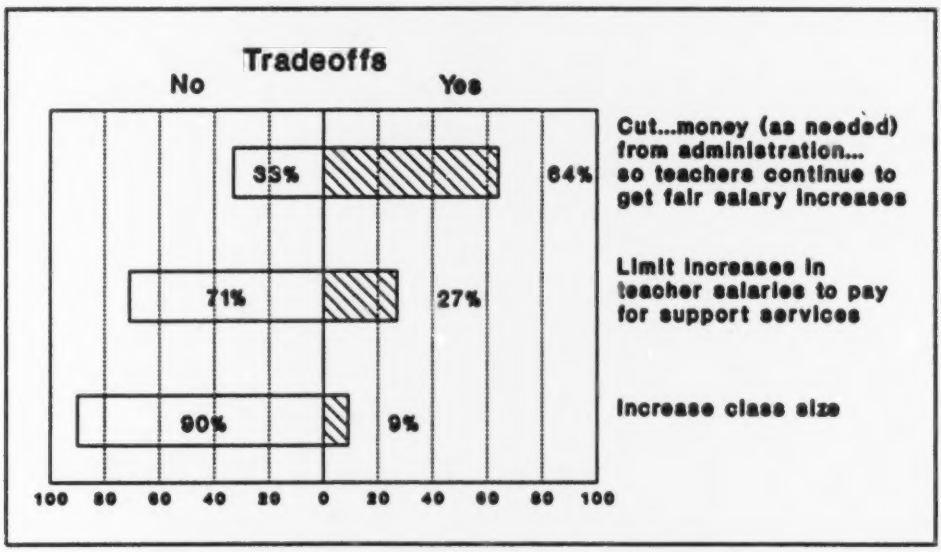
Selected Findings from a New National Poll Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates

TIGHT BUDGETS AND TRADEOFFS

1. Managing School Budgets

Faced with responsibility for managing their school's budget with limited resources, most teachers would take several other actions before increasing class size or reducing their future salary increases.

Question: If you were responsible for managing your school's budget and had limited resources, would you...?



It is useful to note both the majority view and the views of substantial minorities. One-third (33%) of teachers say they would not cut as much money as necessary from other services to assure continuing fair increases in teacher salaries, and 27% would limit increases in teacher salaries to pay for more support services. The responses to these questions are fairly consistent across teacher income levels.

The most unacceptable option for teachers is increasing class size -- only 9% of teachers say they would do this.

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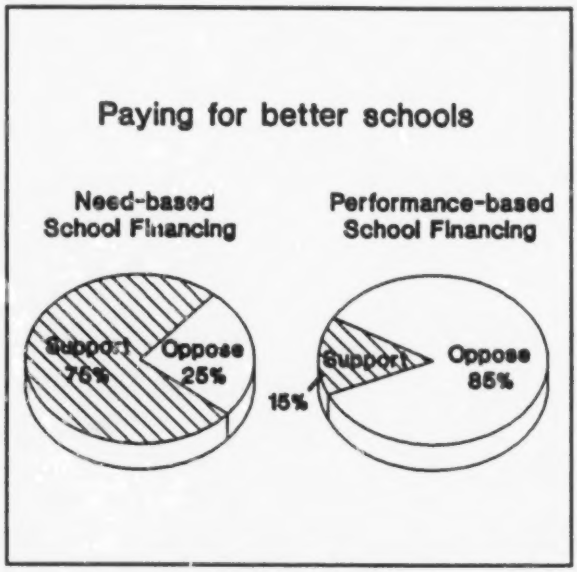
2. School Finance

Fully 75% of teachers believe states should provide "greater financial assistance to schools with more poverty and students with more education problems than to schools that have students who are better off." This policy is opposed by 25% of teachers; only 8% strongly oppose it. Teachers overwhelmingly reject the concept that "all funding increases to schools should be linked to the performance of students in the school."

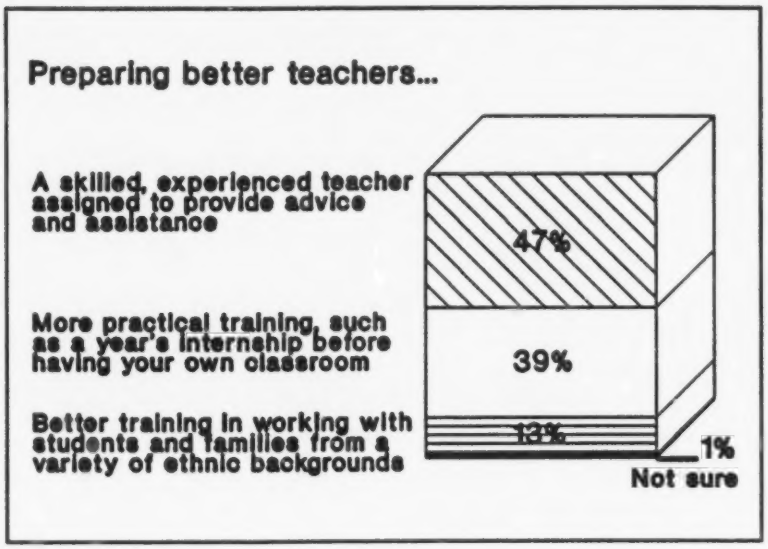
Opposition to this proposal is uniformly strong among all teacher groups, including teachers who might benefit the most from it--those teaching in schools they themselves describe as excellent-quality schools (80%).



School Choice?

In previous surveys, both teachers and parents have demonstrated ambivalence about school choice. Most recently (1989), 53% of teachers said they felt school choice "would help to improve education," while 46% felt it would not help. A 1987 survey disclosed that, while both parents and teachers believe choice would lead parents to be more involved in schools, about 70% of parents--and 75% of teachers--felt that, with choice, "some schools would be unpopular and children going there would lose out," and "richer children would end up at better schools and poorer children would end up at others."

WHAT WOULD HELP TEACHERS BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

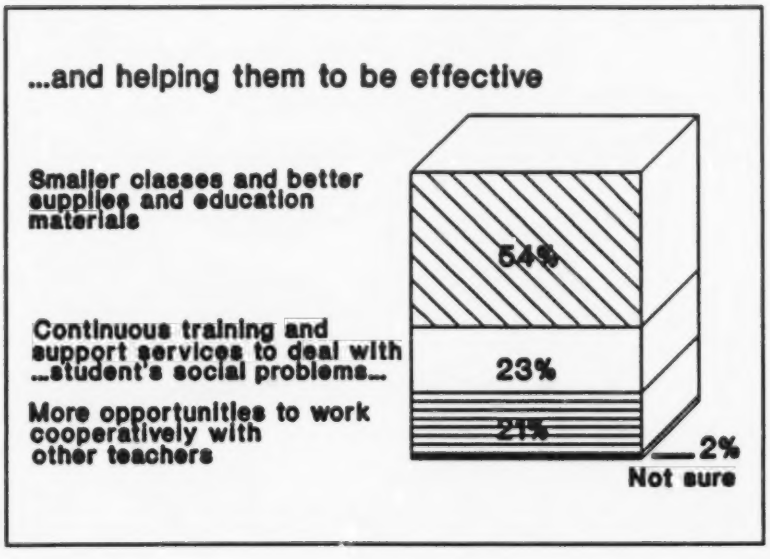

Preparing better teachers...
A skilled, experienced teacher assigned to provide advice and assistance
47%
More practical training, such as a year's internship before having your own classroom
39%
Better training in working with students and families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds
13%
1%
Not sure

3. The Importance of Mentor Teachers

Question: Thinking of your first year or two as a teacher, which one of the following would have been most helpful in preparing you to be a more effective teacher?

4. Teachers see class size as a key factor for effective teaching

Question: Which one of the following would be most helpful to you now in being a more effective teacher?


...and helping them to be effective
Smaller classes and better supplies and education materials
54%
Continuous training and support services to deal with ...student's social problems...
23%
More opportunities to work cooperatively with other teachers
21%
2%
Not sure

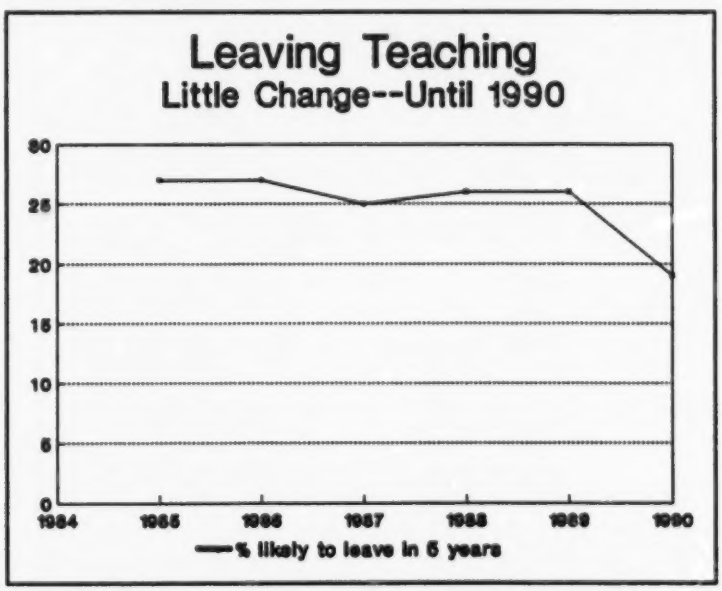
TEACHER RETENTION

5. The number of teachers who will leave the profession is down

A sharp drop in teacher "dropouts" may be expected, perhaps because of improvements in the profession and also a perceived shortage of alternative careers.

Question: *Within the next five years how likely is it that you will leave the teaching profession to go into some different occupation?*

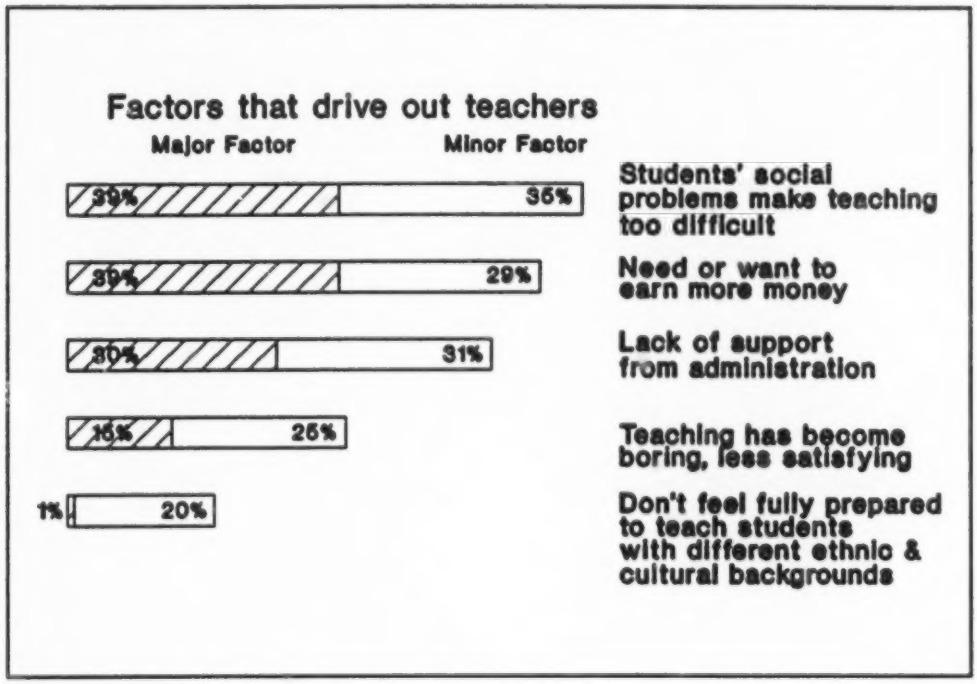
	Total	Teachers with less than 5 years experience
	%	%
Very likely	9	4
Fairly likely	10	8
Not too likely	25	34
Not at all likely	56	53



6. What drives teachers out of the classroom?

For teachers who may leave the profession, students' social problems are a major factor in their decision -- as important as pay.

Question: Is... a major factor, a minor factor, or not a factor in your thinking about leaving teaching?



7. And what might keep them in teaching?

No one change for teachers is substantially most favored.

While most teachers (53%) say greater respect for their profession would exert a major impact on keeping them in teaching, more involvement in decision-making also receives high priority (51%). But if asked to rank factors, a plurality (26%) chose better pay (with more room for future increases) as the one factor that would have the greatest impact on their decision to continue or to leave teaching.

THE SURVEY DESIGN

This survey was designed to measure the needs, plans, and perceptions of teachers in America's public schools.

A sample totaling 1,000 teachers was surveyed, designed to be representative of all teachers in the public schools in kindergarten through g..de 12 throughout the United States.

As in prior Metropolitan Life Surveys of the American Teacher, Louis Harris and Associates drew a random sample of current teachers from a list of 1.2 million teachers compiled by Market Data Retrieval of Westport, Connecticut. Sample sizes for complete interviews were set for each state, based on statistics of public school teachers in each state published by the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics.

In June 1990, the sample was established for periodic surveying. At that time, each teacher was contacted at his or her school by telephone, and requested to participate in two surveys during the 1990-1991 school year. The message included a toll-free number to allow a return call.

Each teacher was screened to ensure that he or she currently teaches in an elementary or secondary level public school and teaches at least part-time in the classroom, and would be teaching in the coming school year. Respondents who passed the screen were telephoned at home in December 1990.

WEIGHTING OF THE TEACHERS' SAMPLE

The achieved sample of teachers was weighted to the latest, best available parameters of race, sex, years of teaching experience, and geographic region. This adjusts these key variables, where necessary, to their actual proportions in the population.

POSSIBLE SAMPLING ERROR

It is customary with probability samples of 1,000 to write that "this survey has a possible sampling error of +/- 3%." However, this is a somewhat misleading statement because in any survey there is a small possibility that measurement errors are substantially greater than this, and there is no way to calculate the probabilities of errors arising from factors such as human error, non-response, interviewer bias or respondents who do not understand the questions.

For a copy of the complete report, please write to:

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Teachers' Survey 1991
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